

Environmental Process Improvements

The most notable results from this partnership are the process improvements in environmental permitting and wetland, stream and buffer mitigation processes.

- In 2002, NCDOT forged a partnership with DENR and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to create the nationally-recognized Ecosystem Enhancement Program, which will enable mitigation to be implemented years in advance of project construction.
- DENR and NCDOT have also established a formal dispute resolution procedure to ensure that difficult issues are resolved early between each agency.
- To encourage participation by DENR staff early and throughout project development, implementation and maintenance, NCDOT currently funds 13 positions within DENR. These positions bring issues and concerns up early and help develop proactive ways of dealing with them. In addition, some of the positions provide joint environmental training to NCDOT, DENR and other state and federal agency staff.

Water & Air Quality Programs

- DENR and NCDOT identified appropriate locations to place river basin signs along primary routes designating boundaries of each river basin. The signs were purchased through a grant from the Federal Enhancement Program. The state map also features the 17 river basins throughout the state, as well as contact information for DENR's Office of Environmental Education, which sponsors the River Basin Signing Program.
- Basinwide Restoration Plans, which are comprehensive water quality improvement plans, are being developed by DENR's Wetland Restoration Program largely through NCDOT's grant of \$2.5 million annually for seven years. These plans will enable wetland and stream mitigation to be targeted to most effectively address the specific water quality needs of a particular watershed.
- The North Carolina Air Quality Roundtable, co-sponsored by NCDOT, DENR and other partners, is a workshop series bringing together representatives from 30 different groups to cooperatively work to improve the state's response to air quality concerns related to transportation.

Land and Wildlife Preservation

- In January 2002, NCDOT partnered with DENR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire 2,500 acres of land in Hoke County to establish a preserve for the federally-endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. This effort preserves five colonies of woodpeckers and links together an important ecosystem of long leaf pines throughout the southeast.
- In October 2002, NCDOT and DENR contributed \$720,000 towards the purchase of Bird Island, the state's last privately-owned barrier island, which is now part of the N.C. Coastal Reserve System. Bird Island contains 1,150 acres of submerged lands (mainly salt marsh) and 147 acres of high ground, and is home to many rare species.
- The two state agencies also participated in the purchase of two view sheds along the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Appalachian Mountains in western North Carolina with assistance from the federal Enhancement Program.

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